

Leah Juliatt

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Testimony in Support of HB06659

Distinguished Members of the Appropriations Health Subcommittee:

My name is Leah Juliatt; I live in Stamford and grew up in Wolcott. I am an LGBTQ+ activist and supporter of CT Against Gun Violence. I am testifying in support of the \$2.5 million on Line T1449 to fund gun violence intervention in FY2024, and the \$400,000 each year on Line 274 for DPH operational expenses.

In December, a month after a deadly shooting at an LGBTQ+ nightclub in Colorado Springs, I organized a fundraiser at Seven Angels Theatre in Waterbury that brought LGBTQ+ performers and policymakers together to support Club Q following the horrific hate-motivated gun violence that took place there.

Organizing a large fundraiser in three weeks was a tremendous task. Still, of all the challenging decisions that came with planning and executing the event, our biggest hurdle was deciding whether or not to hire armed security to stand outside the theatre on the night of the event.

Inside, we had youth and adult members of our queer and trans community, who have been targeted by dehumanizing hate speech online and offline—hate speech that calls into question our right to exist, and to live safely in public.

Even in a state like Connecticut, known to be one of the most progressive states in passing gun violence prevention legislation—even in Connecticut—we were scared. We were scared of bringing guns into a place where vulnerable people were celebrating and being joyful; that is the same storyline that we've heard for years: Gunman targets prayer service; community space; gunman targets pride.

The night of the fundraiser, we locked the doors. We hired a fire marshall. We relied on our community to keep one another safe. And we sang. But somehow it felt like my joy was tainted by fear of violence.

Growing up as a queer kid in Wolcott, I constantly had vivid dreams of being shot. For years, because of the dreams, I was certain that I was going to die at the hands of a gun. I learned early that the places where my community gathered were also beacons for hate-motivated violence. I learned that I was not safe. Being a target in a town where men fly confederate flags and assert their political values with assault weapons has engrained itself into my brain and my memory. I still have dreams of being shot all the time.

I am fighting for the voices of our LGBTQ+ community members lost to gun violence, and the kids, like me, who grew up in a culture where even in our dreams, we cannot escape gun violence. With the systemic severity of community gun violence, we **need** to counter this crisis with more funding. If the State of Connecticut can afford more than \$500 million in tax cuts this year, we can afford \$10 million in public health funding for prevention—to make sure that every teenager can dream of a world without gun violence.

Respectfully,

Leah Juliatt